

11. NOTES ON THE INDIAN SAND SKINK *OPHIOMORUS TRIDACTYLUS* (BLYTH)

The skink, *Ophiomorus tridactylus* inhabits sandy desert regions of Western Rajasthan, India, where 90 per cent of the rain (100 mm. to 400 mm.) falls during the monsoon (July to September). May and June are the hottest months with the mean maximum temperature at 40.5°C. In association with heat waves, 50°C. has also been recorded. Dust storms are not infrequent. The desert is dominated by sand dunes, but rocky outcrops occur at Jodhpur, Barmer, and Jaisalmer. Localities from which *Ophiomorus* was collected (1964-68) were Ganganagar, Hanumangarh, Raisingnagar, Suratgarh, Sadulpur, Churu, Jhunjhunu, Pilani, Ratangarh, Sikar, Lunkaransar, Bikaner, Shergarh, Pachpadra, Balotra, Shiv, Barmer, Gadra Road, Munabau, Sundra, Kolayat, Bap, Phalodi, Pokran, Mohangarh, Nagaur, Ramgarh, Jaisalmer, Devikot, Hindumal Kot, Osian and Jodhpur.

The skinks can be collected abundantly from the month of February to May after the cold weather and September to November after the monsoon. The skinks leave zig-zag tracks while moving under sand. These tracks always commence from a bush and can be followed to their apex and if a finger is lightly pressed into the sand at this point the presence of the lizard can be felt by its slow movement under the sand. If a sieve is then shoved into the sand the lizard can be lifted out. This is the best way of collecting this slippery lizard, if the tail is not to snap. On the sand dunes, the skinks normally venture out soon after dusk and cease their activity before dawn. In captivity the skinks were in a state of torpor in late December and January. In March a few among the captive skinks moulted, the skin peeling off in flakes. Dead specimens of other terrestrial lizards are found on the road, crushed by vehicles but *Ophiomorus* has not been sighted so far in this condition.

The coloration of the skin is creamy or pale brown on the dorsal side and the belly is whitish yellow. The dorsal side of the lizard is studded with distinct longitudinal series of pigment spots. In some cases, the spots get intermingled, so that only a broad band of faint, diffused spots, is formed.

The tail length varies individually in relation to the snout vent length. A few specimens had regenerated tails.

The maximum snout vent length is 95 mm.; tail 70 mm. The greatest body diameter at the middle of the body is 25 mm.

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